

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.heraldtribune.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.



10518271

Article published Apr 16, 2003

The phosphate drain Depletion of Florida resource jeopardizes nation's future needs

Florida's phosphate industry found itself in the unusual position of defending its patriotism last week at a Hardee County Commission meeting. The criticism was largely off the mark, but the subject of the commission's ire -- the sale of phosphate to China -- warrants far more attention than it currently gets.

For many years, the phosphate industry could count on a warm reception in Hardee. But in recent months, officials have begun questioning the long-term effects of strip mining. On Thursday, the talk shifted to the industry's dealings with China.

Commission Chairman Bill Lambert expressed concern that much of Florida's phosphate supply is going to China, which didn't support the U.S. war in Iraq. According to the Highlands Today newspaper in Sebring, Lambert said it bothered him to see phosphate going to countries that "don't agree with us as Americans."

Industry officials explained that they sell their product to a world market, which helps keep domestic prices down. Selling phosphate to China, they contended, isn't a patriotic issue. "The hell it isn't!" Commissioner Walter Olliff Jr. responded.

Beneath the anger is an issue of genuine national interest. For years, critics have been arguing that the industry is recklessly chewing up a finite resource with little regard to our country's future needs.

Phosphate companies control a substance vital to modern agriculture. Phosphorus is one of the basic elements necessary for the growth of plants and animals, and there is no known synthetic substitute.

Although it's found naturally in the soil, the levels of phosphorus have been lowered by intensive farming over generations. In many parts of the world, it's necessary to replenish the soil with phosphate fertilizer.

Florida produces about 25 percent of the world's phosphate and about 75 percent of the U.S. needs. But the supply is running out. By most estimates, the industry has about 30 years before it depletes the ore in Florida that can be profitably mined with existing technology.

Mining companies are now seeking approval to move their operations deeper into Southwest Florida, where the last of the deposits lie. Once that supply is gone, the United States -- which now has about 8 percent of the world's reserves -- is likely to become reliant on other countries.

Hardee officials are correct: The sale of phosphate to China is troubling. But the issue isn't where the phosphate goes. It's where our nation will get phosphate once the raid on Florida's supply is complete.

Byle, William**From:** Molly Bowen [BowenMolly@desoto.net]**Sent:** Wednesday, April 16, 2003 9:03 AM**To:** David Guest; Dinesh; Gail Giles; Bill.Altman@co.desoto.fl.us; Byle, William; nancy Grant; Nona; mary roller; TERRY AYER**Cc:** hshields**Subject:** heraldtribune.com Phosphate -Jeopardizes**News****NO CLOSING COSTS**

[Home](#)[Sarasota](#)[Venice](#)[Manatee](#)[E. Manatee](#)[Charlotte](#)[North Port](#)[Englewood](#)

Wednesday, April 16

SEARCH

Past 14

[Jobs](#)[Cars](#)[Classifieds](#)[Real Estate](#)[Subscribe](#)**NEWS**[Local](#)[State](#)[Nation](#)[Business](#)[Politics](#)[Sports](#)[SNN Video Reports](#)[Obituaries](#)[Weather](#)[In Depth](#)**OPINION**[Editorials](#)[Columnists](#)[Letters](#)[Forums](#)**FEATURES**[Photos](#)[Ticket](#)[Books](#)[Travel](#)[Comics](#)[Crossword](#)[printable version](#)[subscribe](#)[send letter to editor](#)[e-mail article](#)

The phosphate drain Depletion of Florida resource jeopardizes nation's future needs

Florida's phosphate industry found itself in the unusual position of defending its patriotism last week at a Hardee County Commission meeting. The criticism was largely off the mark, but the subject of the commission's ire -- the sale of phosphate to China -- warrants far more attention than it currently gets.

For many years, the phosphate industry could count on a warm reception in Hardee. But in recent months, officials have begun questioning the long-term effects of strip mining. On Thursday, the talk shifted to the industry's dealings with China.

Commission Chairman Bill Lambert expressed concern that much of Florida's phosphate supply is going to China, which didn't support the U.S. war in Iraq. According to the Highlands Today newspaper in Sebring, Lambert said it bothered him to see phosphate going to countries that "don't agree with us as Americans."

Industry officials explained that they sell their product to a world market, which helps keep domestic prices down. Selling phosphate to China, they contended, isn't a patriotic issue. "The hell it isn't!" Commissioner Walter Olliff Jr. responded.

Beneath the anger is an issue of genuine national interest. For years, critics have been arguing that the industry is recklessly chewing up a finite resource with little regard to our country's future needs.

Phosphate companies control a substance vital to modern agriculture. Phosphorus is one of the basic elements necessary for the growth of plants and animals, and there is no known synthetic substitute.



Click to si

Title

Expri
moiEst.
20 Y
New
moiCUS
SUP
Fac
moi

Movies**Arts****Music****Cuisine****Health****Style Magazine****SERVICES****Calendars****Special Events****Archives****Public Records****Jobs with Us****Infoline****InfoMart****Advertise with Us****Customer Service****Clubs Finder****Press Pass****Business Finder****E-mail Services****Contact Us**

Although it's found naturally in the soil, the levels of phosphorus have been lowered by intensive farming over generations. In many parts of the world, it's necessary to replenish the soil with phosphate fertilizer.

Florida produces about 25 percent of the world's phosphate and about 75 percent of the U.S. needs. But the supply is running out. By most estimates, the industry has about 30 years before it depletes the ore in Florida that can be profitably mined with existing technology.

Mining companies are now seeking approval to move their operations deeper into Southwest Florida, where the last of the deposits lie. Once that supply is gone, the United States -- which now has about 8 percent of the world's reserves -- is likely to become reliant on other countries.

Hardee officials are correct: The sale of phosphate to China is troubling. But the issue isn't where the phosphate goes. It's where our nation will get phosphate once the raid on Florida's supply is complete.

Last modified: April 16, 2003 12:00AM

COMING SOON**THURSDAY****The legacy of Judas**

Judas Iscariot is the Benedict Arnold of the Bible, a man synonymous with treachery and betrayal. But could it be that Judas has gotten a bum rap? Was he misunderstood?

Religion & Spirituality

**THURSDAY****The stay-at-home dilemma**

Do some research before becoming a stay-at-home mom, one such mom warns.

Florida West

**FRIDAY****Doing it his way**

Frank Sinatra aficionados make the circuit singing in the bars of Sarasota.

Ticket

**SATURDAY****Colorful transformation**

A Sarasota woman has transformed her back yard in to a lush array of color and greenery.

Home & Real Estate

SW Florida's premier master-planned community.